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ABSTRACT

The Special Studies Program at Hofstra University is designed for high school graduates applying to the University whose educational backgrounds require a more personalized approach to introductory collegiate work. A 26-item questionnaire was administered to 27 former Special Studies students. In addition to demographic data, the areas covered by the questionnaire include present employment status; college attendance; graduation status; reason for enrolling in Special Studies; reason for wanting a college degree; political and community activities; educational plans; educational and social attitudes; satisfaction with specific Special Studies activities; areas where students in the program need special help or advice; ranking various aspects of the program; and personal feelings about the program. (JMF)

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A SURVEY OF SPECIAL STUDIES ALUMNI

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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The Special Studies Program at Hofstra University is designed for high school graduates applying to the University whose educational backgrounds require a more personalized approach to introductory collegiate work. The Division of Special Studies attempts to minimize the risk of poor academic performance by applicants during their first year in college, and to prepare the students for full participation in one of the degree- granting undergraduate programs at the University by the beginning of their sophomore year.

The purpose of this report is to analyze the results of a survey sent to former students of the Division of Special Studies.

Instrument

The instrument was a twenty-six item, six page questionnaire. The survey was developed by the New College Educational Research Office in 1976 specifically to collect dempgraphic, opinion , and attitude data. A large portion of the questionnaire is devoted to having the respondent comment on specific Special Studies program activities.

Procedures

Questionnaires were mailed during the first week of January 1977 to 102 former Special Studies students. This figure includes both students who completed the program as well as students who withdrew. Twenty-seven former students returned the questionnaires by the deadline date of March 1, 1977. Statistical analysis was done through the various subprograms of the SPSS(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) at the Hofstra University Computing Center.

Results

Results of the survey are reported in some detail below. It should be noted that the interpretation of these results is limited by the fact that only 27 of the 102 possible former former students in the program returned the questionnaire. Therefore, these results are not necessarily indicative of information about, or characteristic of, the total population of former Special Studies students at New College.

The demographic and opinion data are reported in semi-tabular form. Following that narrative responses are summarized for conciseness.

1. Male/female respondents:

   Male = 59 %

   Female = 41 %

2. Age range:

   Twenty years or younger = 8 %

   Between 21 - 25 years = 92 %

3. Academic area of interest while enrolled in Special Studies:

   Humanities = 73 %

   Social Sciences = 12 %

   Natural Sciences = 2 %

   Education = 2 %

   Undecided = 11 %

4. Present employment status:

Percent of former students currently employed = 46 %

Employed full - time = 10 %

Employed part - time = 90 %

5. College or university attended after leaving Special Studies(Number of students reported).

Hofstra - New College	= 1
Hofstra - Main Campus	= 7
University of Colorado	= 1
University of Pennsylvania	= 1
Castleton State College	= 1
Paul Smith's College	= 1
University of Hartford	= 1
Boston University	= 1
University of Florida	= 1
Pacific University	= 1
UCLA at Santa Barbara	= 1
University of Buffalo	= 1
C.W. Post	= 2
Farmingdale Tech	= 1
Sarah Lawrence	= 1

Current graduation status:

Graduated = 10 %

Attending = 45 %

Withdrew = 45 %

6. Graduate/professional school attendance:

One student attending Adelphi University for a paralegal course of study. Another former student entered an MS program in Speech at Hofstra then transferred to Julliard. One former student will enter an MBA program in 9/77 -- name of school was not given.

7. Dorm/commuter student when enrolled in Special Studies:

Lived in dorm = 49 %

Commuted to Hofstra = 51 %

8. Major reason for enrolling in Special Studies:

Reason	Percentage
Parents decided on program	10
No other college accepted student	70
Sounded like a worthwile learning experience	10
Individualized format of program	8
Poor high school record	2

9. Major reason for wanting a college degree:

Reason	Percentage
To demonstrate to myself and others that I could do it.	7
To qualify for entrance to graduate/ professional school.	10
To braoden my skills and underatandings for my own satisfaction iN living.	83

10. Political activities angaged in after leaving Special Studies:

Political Activity	Percentage
Discussed political issues with friends.	98
Listened to speeches; news specials, etc., about political issues on TV or radio on a weekly basis(nr montnly).	98
Followed state or national political events regularly in newspaper or magazine.	87
Attended meetings of a political group.	26
Talked with public official about some state or national problem.	18

11. Community activities engaged in after leaving Special Studies:

Community Activity	Percentage
Talked with friends about community issues.	53
Followed local events regularly in newspaper.	24
Had contact with a local official concerning some community problem.	6
Participated in a demonstration or protest about a local issue.	12

12. Travelled abroad since leaving Special Studies:

Yes = 21 %

No = 79 %

Countries visited:

Canada	= 18 %	Mexico	= 2%
Nrothern Europe	= 6 %	Southern Europe	= 6 %
Eastern Europe	= 2 %	Middle East	= 2 %
Africa	= 2 %		

13. Participation in organizations since leaving Special Studies:

Belonged	Held Office	
8 %	2 %	Local community organization
18 %	2 %	Professional organization
16 %	8 %	Political group
46 %	8 %	College group
56 %	6 %	Sports group

14. Political description of self:

Conservative	= 8 %
Middle-of-road	= 8 %
Liberal	= 86 %
Radical	= 4 %

15. Highest degree planned:

B.A. or B.S. degree	= 8 %
Professional diploma	= 2 %
Master's degree	= 10 %
Ph.D. or Ed.D.	= 2 %
Not planning to complete college	= 78 %

16. Educational and social attitudes:

	Agree Strongly or somewhat
Government not controlling pollution.	83 %
Federal government should discourage energy use.	90 %
Should not obey laws against own views.	51 %
Grading in high school too easy.	21 %
Women's activities best confined to home.	36 %
Marijuana should be legalized.	63 %
Students should help evaluate faculty.	75 %
Colleges have right to ban speakers.	85 %
Adopt open admissions in all colleges.	75 %
Use same degree standard for all students.	38 %

17. In terms of personal satisfaction, how important have the following Special Studies activities been ?

	Important	Don't Know	Not Important
Discussing ideas with faculty	92 %	2 %	6 %
Discussing ideas with felloe students	94 %	2 %	4 %
Personal & social relationships with fellow students	80 %	2 %	18 %
The Core Course	73 %	10 %	17 %
Close facilty-student relationships	80 %	2 %	18 %
Rewriting papers, exams, etc.	73 %	10 %	17 %
Signing contract at beginning of program	4 %	10 %	86 %
Variable course credit	80 %	2 %	18 %
Peer teachers	17 %	10 %	63 %

18. Areas in which student needed help or advice and extent of actual help while in Special Studies:

	Needed help	Received help
Developing study habits and/or organizing time.	98 %	52 %
Planning an academic program.	86 %	41 %
Choosing a major or vocation.	73 %	2 %
Personal and social relations.	36 %	36 %
Developing a personal philosophy, ethical and social standards.	45 %	45 %
Increasing writing skills.	63 %	45 %
Personal problems.	21 %	56 %
Planning for after you left the program.	73 %	12 %

19. How would you rate the following aspects of the Special Studies as you experienced them?

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Quality of teaching	42 %	25 %	23 %	10 %
Curriculum and course offerings	10 %	42 %	28 %	20 %
Quality of students	10 %	25 %	35 %	30 %
Quality of faculty	25 %	42 %	23 %	10 %
Quality of administration	10 %	10 %	70 %	10 %
Personal relationships with faculty	40 %	45 %	5 %	10 %
Sense of community	25 %	25 %	25 %	25 %
Personal relationships with fellow students	25 %	23 %	42 %	10 %

20. What is your feeling about the Special Studies Program now?

I have a strong attachment to it	= 42 %
I like it, but my feelings are not strong	= 26 %
My feelings are mixed	= 22 %
I thoroughly dislike it	= 10 %

21. Of your close friends, what proportion are each of the following?

Students who were in the Special Studies Program	= 10 %
Students who are currently attending a college or university	= 76 %
Individuals who have graduated college	= 6 %
Individuals who have dropped out of college	= 8 %

The last question asked if the former student had any suggestions for improving the Special Studies Program and his/her overall impressions of the Special Studies experience.

"The removal of fear of failure was good. However, it became so easy to avoid work that I did just so quite often. When I came to college I had convinced myself that I would buckle down, and then I quickly learned how to get by without doing much. But I probably would have quit working hard no matter what program I was in."

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"I really can't give enough stars for SSP. They would fill this entire booklet! My first year of college was a tramatic one personal problem wise. It was Ignacio, Marge, Don and the rest of the beautiful people of the program that kept me from having a nervous breakdown. I'll never forget that as long as I live and will always be grateful for the way they cared. That's why the program is so successful, because they care about the students. They work with you on an individual basis. I learned how to write, how to study better, how to be more outgoing because of the program. I haven't gotton a C on any papers since I left the program. That's how good it is."

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"I learned about the problems we face everyday. What we can do about them. I learned in Special Studies that there's much more to college than trying to cop that A or B. Things like: what are you going to do with your life? How will you contribute to the community. The program was not a pressure type of thing. We had Wednesdays off, and after each eight weeks we had a week off. Of course, a student has to work independently, more so than she or he would in a traditional academic program. But it was worth it. I've transferred twice since then, with no problem adjusting to the schools academically. Actually, if I had it all to do over again, I would have stayed at New College. There's no place else like it anywhere. Because of this program, I'll graduate with a good record and with a definitw sense of what I want to do. I know this isn't saying much, but Ignacio, Marge and Don, thanks very much."

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"Special Studies helped me immeasurably in beginning my college career. Academically, I found it in every was adequate. However,as my answers here show, I didn!t find much social companionship. Perhaps it was my personality, as opposed to others, or perhaps it was the structure of the program. In any case, I would have enjoyed the opportunity to become closer to fellow students than I in fact did."

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"I have no suggestions for improvement, but I would like to say that the Special Studies Program is one of the best phases of college I have experienced. I only wish it were possible to let some of the SSP methods leak into main campus."

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"I was very unhappy with it and thought it was a waste of $5000.00."

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"My overall impression of SSP was that it was pleasant. It is a trial period for those looking to see what college really is. If it truly is a place worth going to."

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"Special Studies should not just be made as a stepping stone. It really should be what college ought to be. Also, Special Studies, at times seemed to be very strange pretense because it really didn't have power in the total university. I really wanted to leave Special Studies completely, and get quickly involved with main campus."

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"Interesting that you should ask about politics in the questionnaire. Special Studies had a definitive "political" atmosphere, and fairly left-wing one at that !"

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"I really haven't given the matter much thought. May I just use this space to thank Prof. Gotz for opening me to the possibilities of life and giving me a new perspective."

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"I enjoyed Special Studies for what it was, when I was in it. In some ways I felt like at the point in my life it wasn't enough. I truly enjoyed knowing Prof. Gotz who taught me about people and Prof. Mike Gordon who taught me alot about art. Thanks."

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"Special Studies would have been better had it not messed up my credits on main campus. 4 credits for all that money caused me to have to go to Hofstra an extra semester. I truly believe I would have come out the same (re.: G.P.A., etc.) even if I hadn't attended Special Studies. The idea of the program is good but until I read this questionnaire I wasn't even sure of the goals!! If Special Studies really does what this questionnaire lists, please call me because I'd love to start again."

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"First I would like to say that I expected alot from SSP, and I don't think I got much out of it. The basic problem was that it did not help me to decide what to study. When I left SSP and came to Buffalo, I still had no idea of what my major would be, and since I was almost a junior I did not have enough time to take a wide range of real college courses and quickly was forced to decide on a major (phil) and realized afterward that I was just as interested in pol. sci., anthro, and other subjects that I knew nothing about, while in SSP. The courses given by SSP (including the core course) were completely art, psych, phil and English, which are pretty impractical. SSP also gave me no chance to get involved in student government or other student associations. SSP could improve by becomming more flexible in its choice of courses. It should also cut the bullshit about all the studying we should do and try to get the students more involved in university life."

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"It's been a long time but I think SSP should be more demanding of the student. When I transferred to U. of Fla. I found that what I considered work at SSP was nothing here. I would love to see Hofstra and New College raise its' standards and become one of the top schools in New York. I know I got alot out of the program. I learned a great deal about myself and others and am very grateful for that."

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"The program was not only a waste of valuable time (and money), it was represented (implicitly or explicitly) as offering help to the learning handicapped student. I was really at a level 6-8 years below my grade level but this was never even acknowledged or investigated. A Ph.D. or Ed.D. in Educational Foundations in no way qualifies one to administer or teach learning disabled students, which many of the resevoir of applicants are. You should have competent psychologists and learning disabilities specialists. You should spell out just what you will do for the student and what you will NOT do. I was lost and floundering from the 1st day at Hofstra and no one cared."

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"Great experience. Enjoyed it tremendously. It was an awful shock and disappointment when I left the program and discovered that the rest of the world wasn't like the program. Perhaps it was the attention each student was given-- the immediate recognition. The program helped me a great deal. I learned and grew as a result, met a great bunch of people, I even fell in love-- but when it ended and one was left outside the warm confines of Barnard, it was cold, very cold on the outside. And one immediately looks for shelter and slides back within himself. Shame."

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"On an overall basis my Special Studies experience was a very pleasant one. The thing I found most pleasing to myself was the interaction and relationships between students and teachers."

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"The faculty were especially helpful to me and I'm greatly indebited to all of them."

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Summary

Out of a total of twenty-seven respondents, 59 % were males and 41 % were females. The majority (92 %) were between the ages of 21 - 25, with the remainder twenty years or younger.

Approximately one half of the former students reported that they were currently employed. The overwelming majority (90 %) were working part-time in technical, skilled and business-related jobs.

The majority of students leaving Special Studies were accepted in a college or university. Ten percent of the former students obtained a bachelor's degree, while 45 % are presently attending college, and 45 % withdrew from their college program. All students who earned the bachelor's degree, have gone on to graduate or professional school.

For the most part, the former Special Studies students characterized themselves as politically liberal. They considered themselves "liberal" in social and educational issues such as women's rights, legalization of marijuana, open admissions at colleges and evaluation of faculty. Generally, the alumni disagreed that college degree standards should be the same for all students and that grading in high school was too easy.

When enrolled in the Special Stduies Program, most students (73 %) were interested in humanities as their major academic area. A relatively small percentage (11 %) were undecided about their major area.

The majority of former students agreed, that in terms of personal satisfaction, the following SSP activities were important to them: discussing ideas with faculty and fellow students, the Core Course, close student-faculty relationships, rewriting papers, and variable course credit. Signing a contract at the beginning of the program and the peer teachers were not considered important to these respondents.

The Special Studies alumni reported that while in the program they did not receive enough help or advice in developing study habits, planning an academic program, choosing a major, and planning for when they left SSP. Quite a few former students stated they received advice or help in personal problems that they didn't ask for.

Generally, the former students felt that the following aspects of SSP were either excellent or good: quality of teaching, quality of faculty, and personal relationships with faculty. The respondents considered the curriculum and course offerings, quality of students,and quality of administration as average.